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ABSTRACT

The Personal Adult Learning Lab was establsiehd at the Georgia Center for Continuing Education (GCCE) at the University of Georgia to serve self-directed adult learners and conduct research on self-directed learning. The lab allows adult learners to design, conduct, and evaluate their personal learning experiences while proceeding at their own pace. The lab, which occupies a space that is twice the size of an average three-bedroom house and has a 1,400-volume library, is designed to serve adults who are attending conferences at the GCCE as well as others who may walk in, call in, or eventually plug into lab facilities via computer. Materials dealing with career and life planning, management and communication skills, computer literacy, and personal development have been purchased for the lab. Lab staff have also developed supportive handouts, instruction sheets, and lists of additional resources. The lab's long-range marketing strategy, which addresses three major markets (conferees, university faculty and staff, and local businesses and organizations), includes revision of the lab's existing promotional brochure, efforts to obtain periodic coverage in local newspapers and professional newsletters, interaction with university staff in charge of staff development, and development of a videotape presentation. At present, the lab is developing the following different instructional options: conference and business/industry support, staff development, and a network of referral services. (MN)

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Personal Adult Learning Lab (Pall)

Implications for Practice

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Personal Adult Learning Lab

Implications For Practice

The presentation of "Personal Adult Learning Lab: Implication for Practice" is designed to describe the concept, development, and implementation of the Personal Adult Learning Lab located at the Georgia Center for Continuing Education, The University of Georgia. The presentation is divided into five major parts: 1. introduction and description of the environmental setting of the Learning Lab, 2. an overview of mission, purpose, and elements of design, 3. elaboration on materials selection, marketing strategies, and instructional options, 4. a review of materials used in the Learning Lab, and 5. future plans.

I. Introduction and Environmental Setting

To understand the Personal Adult Learning Lab it is important to know something about the environment within which it sits and operates, that is the Georgia Center for Continuing Education. The Georgia Center is a major continuing education facility operating within the context of a land-grant state higher education institution. The Georgia Center opened in 1957 under the auspices of a W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant.

A. Selected Environmental Influences of the Georgia Center

Some major points to consider when thinking about the Georgia Center and its environmental impact on the Personal Adult Learning Lab include: 1. the Georgia Center primarily serves adults for the purpose of non-credit continuing education related to occupational needs, 2. the adults served average between ages 25-65, are employed, have 1 to 6 years of college, an income between $15,000 and $50,000, are two-thirds male/one-third female with approximately the same ratio for white/black; the average stay at the Georgia Center is 2.4 days, 3. the Georgia Center serves about 90,000 adult annually with about 35,000 of those being through residential conference activities, 4. the traditionally used delivery system for continuing education is that of group learning experiences, 5. in addition to the demographic information sited above, it is important to know that the adults served represent a wide spectrum of occupational titles, are from all national geographic areas, and bring the full continuum of life stages to bear on their learning. The Georgia Center sits within a community that has the highest average education level for the state.

B. The W. K. Kellogg Grant

It is also important to understand the context of the more recent W. K. Kellogg grant to the University of Georgia

and, in particular, its expectations for the Personal Adult Learning Lab. The present grant of 8.4 million dollars was awarded in March, 1984, designed for use in four major areas: the Department of Adult Education, College of Education; the Cooperative Extension Service; the Vice President for Service's office for the development of seven faculty task force study groups; and, the Georgia Center for Continuing Education. Within the Georgia Center's portion of the grant there are four projects including the Personal Adult Learning Lab. At the same time the Georgia Center will be adding to its facility; the building addition has 3,400 square feet devoted to the Learning Lab. The expectation for the Learning Lab is that it will serve self-directed adult learners and at the same time research the phenomenon of self-directed learning.

C. Blending of Organization and Grant Expectations

Bringing together the expectations of the grant and the organizational environment of the Georgia Center has helped to establish some early bases of operation. It is from these base lines that other decisions can grow. They include: 1. the Georgia Center has a history of 30 years that impact on client expectations, organizational procedures and support, and philosophy, 2. the Lab allows us to broaden our delivery of services to our traditional markets to include individualized approaches, 3. the Lab

also allows us to introduce new market potential into an established organization, 4. there is a high level of expectations among our clientele, 5. our clients are oriented toward continuing education, are a relatively sophisticated market, and are adults.

II. Mission, Purpose and Elements of Design for the Personal Adult Learning Laboratory (PALL)

A. Mission

The PALL mission is to facilitate adult learning in a self managed framework. Adults have many learning options available to them...one of which is the design, conduct and evaluation of a personal learning experience.

B. Purpose

The purpose of the learning laboratory (PALL) is to help adults learn...at their own pace or speed...on their own time schedule...and for their own individual needs. Management of your own learning project or activities is not anything new. People have designed and carried out their own learning project for centuries. However, it is a relatively new venture for a major university (with the help of a large grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation) to: designate a large area for self managed learning activities;

select professional staff to design such a facility; screen, select and acquire visual and print resource specifically for self managed learning; and, market the facility and its resources to audiences on-campus, locally, regionally and statewide.

C. Elements of Design

The Personal Adult Learning Lab (PALL) is designed to serve both adults who are attending conferences at the Georgia Center for Continuing Education and others who may walk in; call in; and, could even eventually "plug-in" via computers to the PALL resources. An area (3400 square feet) about twice the size of an average three bedroom house has been designated as the PALL in the plans for expanding the residential conference center. A staff/conferee library containing approximately 1400 volumes is adjacent to the PALL. Maximum use of the PALL space is designed to accommodate an open, bright, cheerful and flexible location where individuals may design, discuss, conduct, review, revise, and evaluate self managed learning projects. Projects may be started and completed within or outside the PALL.

In designing the lab many elements were considered such as: a client profile; resources and services; content delivery modes; management; cost and fees; marketing; use of space; learning skills; research; and learning

techniques/learning styles. We are going to discuss some of these elements in more detail such as selection of materials, marketing strategies and instructional options.

III. Expansion of Design Elements

The following three design elements are discussed within the context of the last twelve months, with special attention paid to the period from May through mid-October, 1986, when the Learning Lab has been in operation.

A. Materials Selection

Materials for the Learning Lab were selected and purchased in several general content areas: career/life planning (including assessment, learning style and learning plans), management and communication skills, computer literacy and personal development. These content areas were chosen after careful review of other examples of adult learning centers and consideration of those areas which would complement and support the larger professional education opportunities of the Georgia Center.

In conducting a review of existing learning center holdings, the Personal Adult Learning Lab Committee was able to visit several facilities, such as those at Georgia Power, Georgia Tech and a variety of community colleges. These

visits provided information about physical design and material storage, as well as information about specific materials and content areas. Following these visits and a meeting with an Atlanta consulting firm which markets adult education materials, a preliminary list of materials was drafted.

Several specific materials were brought to the staff's attention during the course of this exploration by way of contact with certain educational companies, personal communications and product literature. Some of these materials were: Discover for Adult Learners, Life and Career Planning and the Learning Style Inventory, Comsell videodisc computer training programs and the Personal Skills Map.

All choices were guided by available examples and good fit with the Georgia Center's overall educational programs; all materials were required to be self-instructional and self-paced. The specific choices were based on three factors; recognized, reputable vendors, opportunities for free preview (especially for expensive materials) and representation of different delivery modes (computer-aided instruction, videotapes, audiotapes and printed materials)

What we learned as a function of this initial selection and purchase is represented in the form of several cautions and concerns:

*less expensive materials (audiocassettes, printed forms and instruments) can be a financial risk, due to

the fact that these materials are seldom available for preview and that similar topics offered by different vendors may differ widely in quality;

*successful relationships with the vendors you use are based on several factors: clarification of the level of support after purchase, thorough review of the product before purchase and documentation of both the product's usefulness and the vendor's attitudes over time:

*good storage and easy access to materials is important to the smooth flow of daily operations; however, protected storage is also important for security purposes;

We found that the process of selecting, reviewing and purchasing materials appropriate for independent adult learning is a continual one, in which we constantly monitor incoming vendor catalogs, send for free materials (or free preview of materials) and regularly read the relevant magazines, newspapers and newsletters for new product advertisements (or comments/criticisms of existing products). To organize our scanning process, two types of files are kept: 1) a series of manila "topic" files, for example, computer software, databases, etc. and 2) an index card file listing individual materials under our major content area categories, for future review.

Finally, it has become clear that he issue of development of suitable materials for the Lab is a real and

pending one. In an early effort to fill certain gaps, several simple instruments were developed: the Learning Needs Survey and the Planning Guide. We have offered these to Lab clients, free of charge, as alternatives to the lengthier computer-assisted instructional materials in the Learning Lab.

Another effort of our own has been to develop supportive handouts and instruction sheets for certain programs we have purchased which do not provide sufficient instruction or description of how they work. Examples include: Discover for Adult Learners, the Thoughtware Management Library and individual videotapes..

In addition, we have put together bibliographies and lists of additional resources, such as government pamphlets, computer periodicals and more general readings. The Learning Lab also offers a two notebook inventory of the University's Career Counseling and Testing services on campus and a comprehensive set of lessons for individual learning available on the University`s Plato system, free of charge.

What remains is the difficult decision about future development of materials and programs; the choices available for the development of computer-assisted instructional materials, to be specific, include authoring systems, authoring languages, or standard computer languages. These choices hinge on the decision to develop completely new materials for the Lab, as opposed to interfacing with

existing programs an resources already available within the Georgia Center.

B. Marketing Strategies

The process of developing marketing strategies for the Learning Lab has been an ongoing one for about the last twelve months, with the initial efforts put into practice at the time the Learning Lab officially opened in May 1986.

Prior to the official opening, a variety of promotional materials were developed, including: a three-fold three color brochure describing the Personal Adult Learning Lab, a letter introducing the Lab's services, an Orientation sheet, a Tips for Learning handout and several paper-and-pencil instruments.

When the Learning Lab opened, these materials were first introduced to conferees on a regular basis, usually by placing them in their conference packet of materials. This strategy continues to be our practice. Around the time of opening, every effort has made to introduce the Lab to all the Georgia Center staff, in order to acquaint them with the Lab as a new set of services and to make them aware of their own professional development opportunities. We felt, and continue to feel, that the more knowledgeable the staff of the Center are about the Lab's services, the better they can represent the Lab to conferees.

Besides informing the Center staff and distributing promotional materials to conferees, contacts with people in the University Counseling and Testing Services and Academic Advising Services were made, and all promotional materials were sent to the local adult education organizations.

Beginning in July, 1986, Lab presentations were made to many of the on-campus conferences, and this practice continues. The presentations are always very brief (one to two minutes) so as not to disrupt the ongoing program schedule; the cooperation of the Center staff conference coordinators is essential.

During the first few months of operation, a long-range marketing strategy plan was developed, which addressed the three major markets: conferees, University faculty and staff and local businesses and organizations. With these groups in mind, the following efforts are being implemented in 1986:

*a re-draft of the brochure and introductory letter

*Personal Adult Learning Lab buttons ("Learn with PAL")

*posters of the Lab displayed in the registration area conference rooms and elevators

*periodic local newspaper coverage: Georgia Center newspaper (Quarterly), University publications (Dimensions, Columns), Career Counseling and Testing newsletter to adult students

*coverage in regional/national professional newsletters (Adult and Continuing Education Today)

*continued presentations to the majority of on-campus conferences

*letter to all University department heads about the Lab and the ways it might be use to them in their staff development programs

*interaction with the University staff person in charge of staff development, who will present the Lab's services to different levels of employees throughout campus

*presentations of ongoing activity and progress to the different Divisions of the Center, in order to provide feedback on their support and encourage participation

*videotape presentation for use with conferences and University and local groups

*additional contacts with other University departments, such as the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and local groups, such as the local Vocational and Technical School, Chamber of Commerce and local professional organizations (eg. psychologists).

Other marketing efforts are being planned for 1987, and they include working with conferences coordinators during the earliest planning stages of a conference to become part of the program and schedule. Several conferences with topics which the Learning Lab can support have been identified. The Lab has already been able to support one such conference, of county and municipal clerks, who utilized the Lab's services during their conference in order

to earn one-to-three additional professional development hours for their certification program. A list of local businesses and industries is being developed as the first step in an effort to market specific Learning Lab materials and resources to specific organizations. To focus on the community level, a different brochure, directed at netcomers to the Athens area, is under development.

C. Instructional Options

The Learning Lab is currently developing several different instructional options, or methods of instruction. The first of these involves conference support, and we are making plans to interface with specific conferences in a number of ways: pre-conference activity (a chance to schedule Lab time and complete one of the instruments), conference activities (in support of workshop topics or for general enrichment) and post-conference contact (a follow-up letter which supports their use of the Learning Lab and encourages their future attendance).

Staff development will continue to be an important instructional option and plans are underway to bring together materials which can be used to enhance support staff training, with topics such as appropriate dress for work, handling the difficult customer, meeting and greeting, etc. To a great extent, our extension in this area depends on the expressed needs of the staff.

The Learning Lab will also be moving in the direction of developing a program of business/industry support within the community. With carefully chosen materials and resources, we plan to offer a number of education options to the local business community for enriching their own staff development programs. The content areas we observe to be most relevant include many management and communication topics, and the general computer literacy topic.

Also within the local community environment, we plan to make the Learning Lab available for selected referrals from local professionals in areas of counseling and psychotherapy. And, in the same vein, plans are being developed to identify and tie into a network of referral resources, to be used in the support of adult learning projects. The opportunities to develop such a network for the Learning Lab are enhanced by our location in the traditional educational setting of a major university.

IV. Distribution of Materials and Question and Answer Period

The following materials include examples of the Learning Lab promotional materials, handouts and first-draft instruments.

V. Future Plans

The future plans for the Personal Adult Learning Lab can be discussed within the context of the three design elements mentioned above: materials selection, marketing and uses of the Lab.

The selection of new materials for the Learning Lab is closely tied to the expressed learning needs of the adult learners we deal with, and we plan to identify materials for support staff training and curriculum resources which can help develop self-directed learning skills. Development of an effective bibliographic service, tied to the huge resources of the University Main Library, is also part of our plans. Consideration is being given to the development of practical language skills programs. A significant element of plans for future purchases is the question of how many copies, if any, the Lab should have of frequently used materials, or materials which may be available for rental. The cost factors included in this decision make it an important one.

Future marketing strategies will include producing additional promotional materials which include a "tear-out" for comment and requests for more information, as well as individual advertisements for particular materials of special interest to the local business community. Specific mailing lists of local organizations and individuals will also be developed. At some level, an assessment of community learning needs and interests will be undertaken.

As far as future plans involving the different uses of the Learning Lab, the primary thinking involves developing viable delivery modes for these different users. The choices include computer-assisted instruction, electronic bulletin boards, memberships in appropriate database networks, interactive video programming and potentional teleconference programs. The choices made will be dependent on the relationship that is determined between the needed content and the best technology for the job.

We welcome your comments and your interest, and would like you to have the opportunity to stay in touch with what's happening in the Personal Adult Learning Lab and the Georgia Center. You can do that by getting on the mailing list to receive the Georgia Center Quarterly; get on the Learning Lab mailing list and we will keep you posted, periodically, on our activities.